Mch. 31, 1899. - 2M. - $11.75 - Willett.

A Woman's Club

Of National Interest

LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

OF THE

BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS AND THE WOMAN'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

156 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY, N. Y

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THE educated American woman as a social power, as an intellectual leader, as a philanthrophic enthusiast, as an organizer in the field of reform, is regarded by all nations as an amazing *success*, whether they give her admiration or anathema.

It is edifying to read in the foreign newspapers the comments of German and French educators who were sent as delegates to the congresses in connection with the Columbian Fair at Chicago. The consensus of opinion was expressed by the chief commissioner of the German educational exhibit in his verdict—which may seem extravagant to many of us—that "as business and politics take up the time of the majority of the men, the women have become the supporters of the higher intellectual interests, and the promoters of intellectuality in domestic life."

A most incisive leaflet, which I have pasted into my Bible, is entitled "Responsibility of Christian Women, Respecting Culture." It speaks of the modern temptation that has come, clad in the garb of an angel of light, to the women of our churches and its watchword is "Culture, Culture."

This is the day of woman's clubs, and I venture to affirm that no woman here is so behind the times but that she belongs to a club for the study of art, or literature, or history, or social science, or current events; and few are the women who are satisfied with only one such organization. Woman's clubs and what they are doing now form a separate department in the daily newspapers.

There is a German proverb which asserts that "the good is the enemy of the best;" and while I would not decry the clubs that have "as their purpose the promotion of refinement and intelligence," I should question the right of any woman who has pledged her loyality to Christ's kingdom, to so fill her time with purely intellectual and social interests that the things that pertain to the kingdom are crowded out.

You will all agree with me that there comes a time in our lives when a choice must be made both in our reading and in the multitudinous interests that clamor for attention. Shall

we give the Bible a scant fifteen minutes while we devote hours of study to the comprehension of Browning, or let the latest magazines and the newest books have the first place? It it is safe to conclude that what tempts oneself tempts one's neighbor also. Our tables are piled high with fascinating literature which beckons to us most alluringly. We are free to choose. And too often it is the *good* that claims us rather than the *best*. A wonderful opportunity has come to the women of America, in these closing years of the nineteenth century, to make their lives full and rich and gloriously useful. Opportunity means responsibility. As the sainted Dr. Gordon, of Boston, once said, "It also means *importunity*, as though God were beseeching us by every open door to open our hearts, and to open our hands, and to open our purses that we may worthily meet the crisis of missions which is upon us."

This banding together of women is a growth of the last twenty-five years. Doubtless the part our patriotic women took during the Civil War in equipping regiments, or in administering soldiers' hospitals, or in sanitary commission service, was a training school. Women had learned to co-operate with each other in work; and soon after the war closed, certain prominent organizations of women came into existence.

No woman can enter heart and soul into this work without having her mind quickened, her horizon broadened, her heart enlarged, her spiritual nature made sensitive and sympathetic. It sometimes seems to me that the chief reason why our Lord and Master permits us to be co-workers with Himself is for our individual development, rather than for the little any of us can accomplish in helping forward His kingdom. You remember how Marcella, in Mrs. Humphrey Ward's skillful story, threw herself without stint into the solution of the sociological problem, and how she failed in her attempt to improve the condition of the poor. But were her efforts entirely lost? By no means, for Marcella herself was developed from a crude, selfish school-girl into a noble, self-sacrificing woman. We know that advance has been made—and great advance—even in the few years we women have been specially engaged in this work, and I like to feel that perhaps in this earth-school we are preparing for nobler and more effective service in that world where His servants do "serve Him day and night in His temple." It seems to me cause for devout thanksgiving when early in life we find some noble employment which we shall not outgrow, as little girls do their dolls; which will not lead to the discontent and satiety one sees in the face of the so-called

"society woman," but which will become more and more an absorbing passion as life advances and as selfishness is consumed in the holy flame of love for the Master and zeal for His reign of righteousness on the earth.

In view of the importance and immensity of the work there is to be done for the salvation of our country, it seems incredible that there are Christian women who feel at liberty to waste their time in what our Puritan forefathers would call "vain recreation." I think it was Catherine Beecher who said that she was going to postpone card-playing until she got to heaven. If it really would add greatly to her happiness she could take it up in that world, but in this she thought she could use her time to better advantage.

Speaking of the large proportion of the women of our churches who have not indentified themselves with this work, I may say that if your experience has been similar to mine you will have noticed that among the uninterested there are two classes. One class, and not a small class either, glory in their shame. They look into your eyes when you appeal to them to do something for this cause, and without hesitation they affirm, as though it were something to be proud of, that "they have not the *slightest* interest in Missions." You all will recognize that peculiar emphasis on "slightest."

And yet they are professing Christians. They know that Christ said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." That means all His commandments, and not a part of them merely, and what command is more binding than the last great command which our crucified and risen Lord gave to His disciples and through them to His church in all ages?

The second class of uninterested ones confess their indifference, but they regret it and ask how they can awaken an interest they do not possess. The deepest root of the lack of interest in five-sixths of the women of our churches is their lack of knowledge. This holds true in all departments. We are not interested in political economy, perhaps—few women are. Why? Because we know so little about it. We are not interested in astronomy. Why? Because many of us look at the starry heavens and cannot trace the constellations that have blazed over our heads since childhood. There are scores of subjects we never gave a thought to; we are not interested in them, because we are utterly ignorant of them. We are doubtless losers in many ways for not being better informed as to these subjects, but no *moral responsibility* rests upon us in regard to these. We do not expect in that last great day of final reckoning to hear our Master say, "Why did you not inform

yourself about botany, geology, astronomy, so as to better understand the wonderful works of the Creator?" But we have reason to apprehend that the Master will ask if we have done what we could to send a knowledge of the Cross and all it means to a lost world to those little heathen of our own country whose only association with the blessed name of Jesus is as a "swear word."

The salt that is to save America from early decay is found in just such societies as this woman's Home Missionary organization. May the God of our fathers keep us from perishing, like the old, corrupt civilizations, through our wealth, our prosperity, our luxurious living and pleasure seeking, our lavish expenditure upon ourselves, aud our shameful penuriousness toward our missionary societies and secretaries and faithful workers at the front! —From address of Mrs. Joseph Cook, of Boston, published in *The Home Missionary*.

Price, 2 cents each; $1.75 per hundred.
No. 173, 2d Ed., 2, 1899.